



With Oil Over \$107 a Barrel California Should Lead the Charge for High-Speed Rail

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Last week oil prices hit a record \$106 a barrel, and gas prices are hovering between \$3.50 and \$4 a gallon in many California cities. In fact, in the tiny coastal town of Gorda, about 40 miles south of Big Sur, the local gas station was selling gasoline for \$5.19 a gallon over the weekend. Increasing evidence that the era of cheap oil is over is all around us.

Last week CALPIRG Education Fund released a new report, [A Better Way to Go: Meeting America's 21st Century Transportation Challenges with Modern Public Transit](#), which examines the challenges faced by America's transportation system and the benefits of existing rail and bus projects across the country.

The report found that thanks to public transit, each year California saves more than 486 million gallons of oil, the rough equivalent of taking more than 800,000 cars off the road. As a result, California is far less dependent on oil than we otherwise would be and consumers are less susceptible to gas price spikes. Additionally, the state of California is committed to reducing our global warming pollution by 25% by 2020, a commitment that will be difficult to reach unless we reduce our dependence on cars. Public transit already prevents almost 3.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide pollution annually.

The compelling benefits of existing public transit are all the more reason to invest and expand our public transit services, from local rapid bus lines to high-speed rail connecting our cities.

In fact, this November, California voters will have the opportunity to support a bond measure to cement the state's commitment to building high-speed rail. The rail line would take up to 92 million car trips off the road each year and take 18 million travelers who would otherwise fly. That means a lot less traffic, a lot less pollution, and billions in avoided costs in road and airport expansions.

But for a project this big, the state's top leaders must be fighting for it every step of the way.

Governor Schwarzenegger has made expanding California's transportation infrastructure a priority of his administration. But unfortunately, so far he's focused mostly on investing in roads and highways. To get the funding that we need to start laying the tracks-- from federal, state, local, and private sources

-- we need Governor Schwarzenegger's complete and unwavering support for high-speed rail. If we don't, we'll surely regret it when more gas stations start selling \$5 a gallon gas.

Steve Blackledge provides policy and strategic guidance for the state PIRGs, primarily focusing on the issues of health care and consumer protection. Prior to this position, he spent five years as the legislative and policy director for [CALPIRG](#), where his work led to new state-level policy reforms on issues ranging from health care and prescription drug costs, to Enron-style accounting scams, to protecting consumers from privacy invasions and identity theft.

Posted on March 11, 2008